

VZCZCXYZ0007
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHJM #0610/01 0930933
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 030933Z APR 09
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4585
INFO RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 8579
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 5159
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 4729
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2940
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T JERUSALEM 000610

SIPDIS
NOFORN

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR SHAPIRO/PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/03/2019
TAGS: MOPS PHUM PTER KWBG KPAL KHDP IS GZ
SUBJECT: UXO DISPOSAL IN GAZA STALLED

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Unexploded ordnance (UXO) removal by the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in Gaza has stalled after coordination failures between the UN and Hamas, and between the UN and the IDF, according to UNMAS Gaza's Program Manager. He explained that tens of thousands of pounds of unexploded ordnance in Gaza are now controlled by Hamas. The UNMAS Program Manager says the agency will likely reduce to a skeleton staff by the end of April unless Hamas cooperates in providing access to UXO, and unless Israeli authorities allow specialized UXO disposal equipment into Gaza. End summary.

(C) UNMAS: Lots of Assessing, Not Much Disposing

¶2. (C) UNMAS Program Manager Kerei Ruru briefed Congenoffs on the status of UNMAS's operations in Gaza on April 1. Ruru said UXO removal has stalled due to Hamas refusal to cooperate with the UN, and lack of IDF agreement to import specialized UXO disposal equipment and high explosives needed for controlled disposal. (Hamas authorities stopped cooperating with UNMAS in mid-February, after press reported that a cache of UXO had gone "missing" in Gaza and quoted an IDF spokesman suggesting Hamas appropriated the munitions for use in terrorist operations.)

¶3. (C) According to Ruru, on February 5, UNMAS viewed a cache of approximately 10,500 kg of high explosive munitions secured by Hamas in Gaza. UNMAS rendered inert a number of white phosphorus rounds, which were leaking and risked igniting the entire stockpile. Between February 8 and February 15, that cache was moved to an unknown location. Since early March, Ruru has been involved in discussions with Hamas "Deputy Foreign Minister" Ahmad Yusif to win back Hamas's consent to dispose of the munitions. (Note: Ruru characterized Yusif as "an American-educated moderate" who "spent 20 years" in the U.S. and "sees the big picture". Yusif told Ruru the Hamas refusal to cooperate with UNMAS was not a signal that the team should leave Gaza, and stepped up efforts to convince other Hamas elements, including militants from the Izz al-Din al-Qassam brigades, to allow UNMAS access. End note.)

¶4. (C) Ruru also cited difficulties securing IDF permission to import specialized equipment and explosives used for UXO disposal. Despite receiving the IDF Chief of Staff's permission to import specialized equipment for removing bomb fuses, Ruru has been unable to move the equipment from Lebanon through Israel to a Gaza crossing. (Note: UNMAS prefers a land border crossing from Lebanon, in order to save time and expense. End note.)

¶15. (C) Ruru said he has no agreement from the IDF to bring in high explosives needed for controlled detonations of UXO. He said senior coordination meetings to address all of UNMAS' outstanding requests have been postponed indefinitely. UNMAS has been unable to secure IDF and Hamas agreement on a central disposal area suitable to accommodate UXO as large as 2,000 pound aerial bombs.

¶16. (C) Ruru said that, absent improved cooperation from Hamas and the IDF by April 30, he will recommend that UNMAS draw down and put its mission into hibernation. Ruru asked for USG intervention with the GOI to expedite clearance of the equipment and explosives and identification of alternate central disposal sites.

(C) Assessment of Hamas Capabilities to Exploit UXO

¶17. (S) Ruru said that only two of 70 Palestinian explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technicians previously trained under a European program remain active in Gaza. He said Hamas has the capability to extract high explosives from UXO and re-form them into other shapes. Ruru believes that Hamas has obtained unexploded anti-tank mines and fuses left behind by IDF soldiers and has the capability to combine them into a fully functional explosive device.

(S/NF) UNMAS Aware of Additional Stockpiles;
Guarded on Details

¶18. (S/NF) Ruru said his team is aware of a second stockpile of 4.7 tons of ordnance, and a third cache (size not provided) in the vicinity of Khan Yunis, both under Hamas control. Ruru said GOI and UN leadership know of the caches' existence, but he has not shared specific locations in order to avoid a "leak" from the IDF and a repeat of the mid-February incident.

WALLES